

Faculty of Music

University of Toronto

THURSDAY NOON SERIES

October 20, 1994

12:10 pm

Two Canticles

by

Benjamin Britten

(1913 - 1976)

M

A-gi * vidén-tes stéllam, dixé- runt ad ínvi-
cem : Hoc sígnum mágni Ré-gis est : c-ámus, et ínqui-
rámus é-um, et offerámus é- i mún-e-ra, áurum, thus
et mýrrham. E u o u a e.

Walter Hall
Edward Johnson Building

P R O G R A M M E

Canticle II - Abraham and Isaac, Op. 51
(Text from the Chester Miracle Play)

Introduction by Professor Andrew Hughes
(University Professor and Medieval scholar)

Dean Kustra, counter tenor
Michael Colvin, tenor
John Hawkins, piano



Canticle IV - Journey of the Magi, Op. 86
(Poem by T.S. Eliot)

Introduction by Professor Eric Domville
(Emeritus Professor of English
at Trinity College, U of T)

Dean Kustra, counter tenor
Michael Colvin, tenor
James Westman, baritone
John Hawkins, piano

CANTICLE 2

Abraham and Isaac

God speaks

Abraham, my servant, Abraham,
Take Isaac, thy son by name,
That thou lovest the best of all,
And in sacrifice offer him to me
Upon that hill there besides thee.
Abraham, I will that so it be,
For aught that may befall.

Abraham

My Lord, to Thee is mine intent
Ever to be obedient.
That son that Thou to me hast sent
Offer I will to Thee;
Thy bidding done shall be.

*Here Abraham, turning him to his son Isaac,
saith:*

Abraham

Make thee ready, my dear darling,
For we must do a little thing.
This woode do on thy back it bring,
We may no longer abide.

A sword and fire that I will take,
For sacrifice behoves me to make;
God's bidding will I not forsake,
But ever obedient be.

*Here Isaac speaketh to his father, and taketh
a bundle of sticks and beareth after his father,
and saith:*

Isaac

Father, I am all ready
To do your bidding most meekely,
And to bear this wood full bayn¹ am I,
As you commanded me.

*Here they both go to the place to do the
sacrifice:*

Abraham

Now, Isaac son, go we our way
To yonder mount if that we may.

Isaac

My dear father, I will essay
To follow you full fain.

*Abraham being minded to slay his son Isaac,
lifts up his hands, and saith the following:*

Abraham

O! My heart will break in three,
To hear thy words I have pite;
As thou wilt, Lord, so must it be,
To Thee I will be bayn.
Lay down thy faggot, my own son dear.

Isaac

All ready father, lo, it is here.
But why make you such heavy cheer.
Are you anything adread?

¹willing

Abraham

Ah! Dear God! That me is woe!

Isaac

Father, if it be your will,
Where is the beast that we shall kill?

Abraham

Thereof, son, is none upon this hill.

Isaac

Father, I am full sore affeared
To see you bear that drawne sword.

Abraham

Isaac, son, peace, I pray thee,
Thou breakest my heart even in three.

Isaac

O pray you, father,
Layn² nothing from me,
But tell me what you think.

Abraham

Ah! Isaac, Isaac, I must thee kill!

Isaac

Alas! Father, is that your will,
Your owne child for to spill
Upon this hilles brink?
If I have trespassed in any degree
With a yard you may beat me;
Put up your sword, if your will be,
For I am but a child.
Would God my mother were here with me!
She would kneel down upon her knee,

Praying you, father, if it may be,
For to save my life.

Abraham

O Isaac, son, to thee I say
God hath commanded me today
Sacrifice, this is no nay.
To make of thy bodye.

Isaac

Is it God's will I shall be slain?

Abraham

Yea, son, it is not for to layn.

*Here Isaac asketh his father's blessing on his
knees, and saith:*

Isaac

Father, seeing you muste needs do so,
Let it pass lightly and over go;
Kneeling on my knees two,
Your blessing on me spread.

Abraham

My blessing, dear son, give I thee
And thy mother's with heart free;
The blessing of the Trinity,
My dear Son, on thee light.

*Here Isaac riseth and cometh to his father,
and he taketh him, and bindeth and layeth
him upon the altar to sacrifice him, and saith:*

Abraham

Come hither, my child,
Thou art so sweet,
Thou must be bound
Both hands and feet.

Isaac

Father, do with me as you will,
I must obey, and that is skill,
Godes commandment to fulfil,
For needs so it must be:

Abraham

Isaac, Isaac, blessed must thou be.

Isaac

Father, greet well my brethren ying,
And pray my mother of her blessing,
I come no more under her wing,
Farewell for ever and aye.

*Here Abraham doth kiss his son Isaac, and
binds a kerchief about his head.*

Abraham

Farewell, my sweete son of gracle

Isaac

I pray you, father, turn down my face,
For I am sore adread.

Abraham

Lord, full loth were I him to kill!

Isaac

Ah, mercy, father, why tarry you so?

Abraham

Jesul On me have pity,
That I have most in my mind.

Isaac

Now, father, I see that I shall die:
Almighty God in majesty!
My soul I offer unto Thee!

Abraham

To do this deed I am sorrye.

*Here let Abraham make a sign as tho' he
would cut off his son Isaac's head with a
sword; then:*

God speaks

Abraham, my servant dear,
Lay not thy sword in no manner
On Isaac, thy dear darling.
For that thou dreatest me, well wot I,
That of thy son has no mercy,
To fulfil my bidding.

Abraham

Ah, Lord of heaven and King of bliss,
Thy bidding shall be done, i-wiss!
A horned wether here I see,
Among the briars tied is he,
To Thee offered shall he be
Anon right in this place.

Then let Abraham take the lamb and kill him.

Abraham

Sacrifice here sent me is,
And all, Lord, through Thy grace.

Envoi

Such obedience grant us, O Lord!
Ever to Thy most holy word.
That in the same we may accord
As this Abraham was bayn;
And then altogether shall we
That worthy king in heaven see,
And dwell with him in great glorye
For ever and ever. Amen.

The Chester Miracle Play

The Journey of the Magi

A cold coming we had of it,
Just the worst time of the year
For a journey, and such a long journey:
The ways deep and the weather sharp,
The very dead of winter.
And the camels galled,
sore-footed, refractory,
Lying down in the melting snow.
There were times we regretted
The summer palaces on slopes,
the terraces,
And the silken girls bringing sherbet.
Then the camel men cursing and grumbling
And running away, and wanting
their liquor and women,
And the night-fires going out,
and the lack of shelters,
And the cities hostile
and the towns unfriendly
And the villages dirty
and charging high prices:
A hard time we had of it.
At the end we preferred
to travel all night.
Sleeping in snatches,
With the voices singing in our ears,
saying
That this was all folly.
Then at dawn we came down
to a temperate valley,
Wet, below the snow line,
smelling of vegetation;

With a running stream
and a water-mill
beating the darkness.
And three trees on the low sky.
And an old white horse
galloped away in a meadow.
Then we came to a tavern
with vine-leaves over the lintel,
Six hands at an open door
dicing for pieces of silver.
And feet kicking the empty wine-skins.
But there was no information,
and so we continued
And arrived at evening,
not a moment too soon
Finding the place; it was (you may say)
satisfactory.

All this was a long time ago,
I remember,
And I would do it again,
but set down
This set down
This: were we led all that way for
Birth or Death?
There was a Birth, certainly,
We had evidence and no doubt.
I had seen birth and death,
But had thought they were different;
this Birth was
Hard and bitter agony for us,
like Death, our death.

We returned to our places,
these Kingdoms,
But no longer at ease here,
in the old dispensation,
With an alien people
clutching their gods.
I should be glad of another death.

T.S.Eliot 1888-1965

